

Example of adult and child learning compared research paper

[Education](#), [Teaching](#)



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Adult and Child Learning Compared

Introduction

Pedagogy is the term used to describe the teaching of children. Until recent times, according to “Moving from Pedagogy to Andragogy” (n. d.), it was also used to describe the teaching of adults, but that is nowadays known as andragogy (sometimes spelt androgogy). The reason for this change of terminology, according to the article, is that whereas pedagogy means teacher-directed instruction, whereby those being taught need to learn only what the teacher decides to teach them and are in a fully dependent and submissive role in that environment, which demands obedience from the learners. In contrast, adult learners are more independent, and motivated to learn for their own reasons and to be capable of directing their own learning. The pedagogical approach is therefore likely to be a poor fit to adult learning requirements. This paper discusses and compares the two approaches as practiced in today’s society.

The Research

Florida Tech published an interesting comparison table (n. d.) that shows the differences between the two methods. The table, entitled “ Pedagogy vs. Andragogy” is included for informational purposes verbatim, as Appendix 1 to this paper.

According to Friestad (Dec 1998), the teaching methods described by the terms pedagogy and andragogy “ have become opposite ends of a continuum used to describe the extremes of interactions occurring between a teacher and students”. Friestad reports on a study that concluded however, that both children and adults generally preferred to learn in the same way and that there no major differences in the teaching methods utilized. From the study it was determined that learners – whether children or adults – preferred to learn “ hands-on” supported by teacher guidance. Further, as Friestad reports, the selected teaching method should be based on individual needs, but that because little difference seemed to exist between adult and children learning needs, her recommendation is for others to repeat the study with both a larger number of learners and – in the case of adults – a wider range of their educational levels.

It could be said then, that Friestad’s study – whilst recognizing there are differences of approach between andragogical and pedagogical teaching methods – showed that there is no clear preference for the andragogical teaching method by the adults in the study. However, there are others who believe that there is a general preference by adults for the andragogical method.

Hence, whilst the Florida Tech Table referenced earlier compares the two

models of learning and illustrates where they differ, we need to establish if adults really do favor the andragogical model. Monts (April 2000) published a University of Illinois discussion paper which included examination of precisely that question. Mont defines adult learners as those individuals aged 26 or more, mostly in full-time work whilst attending school or college part-time, for whom most educational programs developed are andragogical in nature. Mont questions the validity of that approach and asks whether in fact those learners might actually prefer pedagogical learning or a combination of the two. Mont reiterates the four assumed differences between the two approaches. The first of those is that in pedagogy the learner is viewed as fully dependent on the teacher, who determines just what the subject should learn. The basis of andragogy is that learners as they grow into adulthood naturally mature, moving from that dependent outlook to one of increasing self-direction. The second assumption is that pedagogy does not value the learner's earlier experiences, but gives major importance to the teacher's experience, the textbooks utilized and other teaching aids used. In contrast, andragogical theory sees the learner's own earlier experience as a learning resource reservoir. Hence pedagogy primarily employs techniques such as lectures, reading assignments, and so on (i. e. generally passive methods from the learner's perspective). In contrast, andragogy focuses more on techniques such as experimental lab work, debate, problem-solving, field work, simulations, etc. The third of those four assumptions is based on the first one; the principle of pedagogy assumes that not only is everyone ready to learn what society dictates, but that a standardized curriculum fits the concept that we all are ready to learn things at the same time in our lives.

Andragogy operates on the principle that learning something is needed when there is need to deal with a specific real-life requirement; i. e. the individual learner's need should dictate when and what is learned. The fourth and last assumption in pedagogy is that what is learned now will be useful at some unspecified time in the future. For that reason, pedagogical learning is subject-based and progresses from simple to complex. Andragogy on the other hand considers education as a process of increasing competence, i. e. to apply today's learning to enrich tomorrow's living. Hence, the learning is centered on performance rather than on subject.

Mont refers to studies undertaken to ascertain the validity of the andragogical approach to adult learning. One such surveyed 173 teachers to ask if their teaching methods for adults were different from those used when teaching young people. The reported results were that in teaching adults they focused more on discussion, they frequently varied teaching techniques, related the classroom teaching to the life experiences of the students, and varied the content according to student feedback. In contrast, in pre-adult teaching, they needed to give more instruction, provide more support of an emotional nature to individuals, had to resort to discipline more often, and kept more rigidly to previously-scheduled teaching activities.

Another Monts-reported study by Darkenwald (1982) showed that in general, teachers used both andragogical and pedagogical teaching principles in combination as needed, rather than adhering – in any given situation – to one or the other. For example, the study findings suggested that using discussion in the classroom as a teaching technique was used in part as a

control measure, perhaps to counter boredom or restlessness on the part of some students.

Another study that Monts cited (Gorham, 1985), followed up the Darkenwald study by adding classroom observation into the mix. Her study more or less confirmed the Darkenwald findings, but added that adult learners showed more curiosity, were highly motivated to learn, worked harder and evidenced less emotional dependency on the teacher. She also considered that the different approaches used by teachers in teaching pre-adults and adults bore significant relation to the teacher's own perception of the age of the learners and that they should therefore be taught in a different manner. Gorham also found that contrary to teachers' reported perceptions, teachers talked about an equal amount of time at both pre-adult and adult learners. Overall, Gorham concluded that an individual teacher tended to use the same techniques in teaching both adult and pre-adult classes, and that differences in room layout had more effect on the teaching method, especially with women teachers. The more informal the classroom layout, the more andragogical became the teaching style.

Conclusions

Despite the clear differences in definition of the andragogical and pedagogical teaching / learning methods (see also Table 1 in Appendix 1 to this paper) the research suggests that in fact the two methods are often used in combination, dependent upon individual situations and circumstances. The assumption is that the andragogical approach is the one favored by and to be recommended when teaching adult learners. This

appears to be echoed by the views of teachers, yet is not fully supported by the Gorham study that included actual classroom observation. One can understand and see the principle behind the two different theories, and there is some evidence to support two distinct approaches. However, the reality is not so black and white.

References

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Appendix 1

Table 1: Pedagogy vs. Andragogy

(Reproduced from Florida Tech): <http://www.floridatechnet.org/inservice/abe/abestudent/andravsped.pdf>